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For Immediate Release:  
February 29, 2008

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- NEWS RELEASE -

## **SEC. BYSIEWICZ & REP. SPALLONE WANT VOTING RIGHTS FOR 17 YEAR-OLDS**

SEC. BYSIEWICZ, REPS REYNOLDS, SPALLONE, VILLANO, AND WIDLITZ STAND WITH  
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND PUSH FOR STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Hartford: On Friday February 29th at a press conference at the Legislative Office Building, Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz, State Representatives James Spallone, Tom Reynolds, Peter Villano and Patricia Widlitz were joined by high school students to support a proposed constitutional amendment that would give thousands of 17 year-olds the right to vote in primaries as long as they are 18 years old by Election Day.

“Connecticut should be among the national leaders when it comes to voting rights,” said Bysiewicz. “Giving 17 year-olds the right to vote will increase turnout, make political candidates more accountable, and address a shocking inequity in our laws that allows a 17 year-old to enlist in the military but not vote.”

House Joint Resolution No. 21 states, “That article fourteenth of the amendments to the Constitution of the State be amended authorize any citizen who has not yet attained the age of eighteen years of age but who will have attained the age of eighteen years on or before the day of a regular election, who is otherwise qualified to be an elector and who has applied for admission as an elector in such manner as may be prescribed by law, may vote in any primary election, in such manner as may be prescribed by law, held for such regular election.”

The United States Constitution does not deny 17 year-olds the right to vote. The 26th Amendment to the United States Constitution only states that the right of citizens who are

eighteen years of age or older to vote shall not be denied by the United States or by any State on account of age. Taking into account that the Constitution does not bar states from lowering the voting age, some states have done exactly that. In the past several years nine other states in the nation have passed measures that allow 17 year-olds to vote in primaries so long as they turn 18 by the general election. The states are: Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia.

“In 1971, as young men were being sent to Vietnam, the 26th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was ratified, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18,” said Sec. Bysiewicz. “Lawmakers thought it was unfair that someone could serve our nation in combat but not have the right to vote. Today there are 17 year-old men and women who have enlisted in the armed services and are fighting a war in our name but they cannot vote. That is wrong and this measure would address that inequity.”

“This morning we will begin the process of amending our state constitution to allow 17 year olds to vote in primaries if they will be 18 on or before the general election,” Rep. Spallone said. “I am confident that we will gain the support needed in each legislative chamber to place the amendment and get the initiative on the ballot this fall. In a time of war, global environmental challenges and economic uncertainty, the stakes for young voters could not be higher. This amendment will help strengthen their voice in public policy matters, and, we hope, encourage a life-long voting habit.”

Lowering the voting age to 17, with said restrictions, would also increase voter participation among young people and help create life long voters. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Maryland, if you vote once you are 4-5 times more likely to vote again than if you never voted.

There are two ways an amendment can be made to the Connecticut Constitution. One option is that three quarters of the House and Senate approve the amendment and then it goes onto the ballot in the next general election that falls on an even numbered year. The other option is for a simple majority in both the House and Senate to approve the measure in two separate legislative sessions. If that happened, it would then go onto the ballot in the next general election that falls on an even numbered year.

Last year a similar resolution won wide support in the General Assembly but fell 9 votes short of having the support of three quarters of the House. The resolution was not raised in the Senate.

“I do not see this as an issue between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party,” said Connor Toole a 17 year-old student from Stonington High School. “Allowing 17 year-olds, who will be 18 by the time of the general election, to vote in primaries is an issue of common sense.”

"If a person is eligible to vote in a Presidential election, they should have a choice in who the candidate will be," said Rep. Widlitz. "This Amendment will enable those eligible voters to have the opportunity to have their voices heard."

A hearing on House Joint Resolution No. 21 is scheduled for today, Friday February 29th, at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford

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